Exploring The Link Between The Use of Facebook and Political Participation among Youth in Pakistan

by Septi Ariadi

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Exploring the Link between the Use of Facebook and Political Participation among Youth in Pakistan

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Abstract

Use of Facebook engages people in online debates. Online political participation becomes a precursor for offline political participation. The study aimed to explore the link between the use of Facebook and political participation among youths in Pakistan. Quantitative data gathered by means of online structured questionnaire was analyzed using the software statistical package for social sciences. Use of Facebook was measured with No. of Facebook accounts, duration of Facebook Account (in years), Time spent (hr) weekly on Facebook, total number of friends and close friends on Facebook while political participation was measured by knowing the ways of participating in online and offline political activities. Use of Facebook was independent variable and political participation was dependent variable. The study concluded that people youth shared more the policy of a particular party on their Facebook timeline than posting pictures about political issues on their profile page. There is a significant correlation was found between use of Facebook and political participation. Usage of Facebook by duration of usage of Facebook, average time spending on Facebook weekly, total numbers of friends on Facebook and close friends on Facebook may increase the political participation among youth and this political participation will lead to open and operation democratic process.

Keywords: Facebook; Online; Participation; Political; Pakistan

Introduction

Social networking websites (SNS) are the most popular means of communication among youths at global level [1]. However, Facebook is one of the most prevalent online medium that facilitates its users to interact with each other in virtual world. Facebook users share their information with other FB users and give them access to their profile [2]. Facebook provides platform for youths in range of activities such as sending messages, uploading photos, giving comments, sharing information that bring different outcomes for their participation [3].

Facebook is the largest online social networking site with over 800 million active users, surpassing other online social networking sites such as MySpace, Friendster, and Bebo. Although the premise of Facebook rests with sharing information via an online interaction, yet it holds basic information about its users and how they interact online with each other's on Facebook [4].

Facebook hosts more than 900 million features and average FB user participates in 80 groups, communities, or events. Among its many features, Facebook groups particularly support social networks and generate discussions based on political matters. Facebook groups have a powerful networking ability through group formation which signifies the power of online participation [4].

The users of Facebook interact with other group members and share political information with ease and speed. Thus, expression of opinions and information exchange build networks among Facebook users as a group.

Facebook provides a common space to its users to discuss a specific topic and exchange political information. Individuals in Facebook groups share their different social and political opinions [4].

Social networking sites especially the Facebook possesses the wall which is the centre of FB users' profile for adding new things like photos, videos, notes and other application content. Friends and Fans of political leaders can post their thoughts, views and criticisms for everyone on it. Walls have three viewing settings; user plus others, just the user, and just others. Most Walls automatically display the user plus others option, showing posts, links, tagged material, and other information posted by both the page's administrator and their members. FB Walls also incorporate the news feed, displaying updates made by the user such as statuses, links, pictures, and other recent activity [5].

Specifically, it was found that social networks create opportunities for youth to gather information about politics that allows them to live beyond personal resource constraints. The effect of social networks on participation is contingent on the amount of political discussion that occurs in youth [6].

Facebook pages, a hybrid between personal profiles and groups, are the latest option for librarians, and were made available in late 2007. It is a free organizational profile for business, performers, political figure and non-profit organizations. On the Facebook pages, individual users may post comments, engage in discussions, share videos and photos, or merely identify themselves as fans of public personalities/leaders [7].

Facebook and Participation

Use of Facebook holds fosters political engagement by lowering the barriers for expression of opinions. Facebook facilitates youth engagement in political activities, which were previously not possible. This feature gives the citizens the possibility to draw attention of government to specific issues and seek broader online support among other citizens. Facebook also gives its members opportunity to engage in less demanding activities, such as 'liking' or 'joining' a social and political online group, 'liking' a political party its candidate and sharing one's opinion on a political topic on their personal and other's wall.

Political activities on FB are new ways to engage political matters because they are also low-cost compared to offline political activism [8]. Facebook provides platform to individuals to get political information and participate in public issues [9]. For example, research on the political rally organizing site Meetup.com found high involvement during the 2008 campaign in USA [10] and previous research linked the same social networking site to increases in campaign donations, volunteering, political candidate's support, and advocacy [11].

Nonetheless Internet access alone does not generally increase political participation but exposure to political material does increase participation [12]. Research has found that the more politically active people are offline, the more they participate in political discussions online and vise versa [13] and that exposure of online political information has both a main and moderating effect on political engagement.

Political participation involves those activities which are related to politics such as donating money for a political campaign or persuading others to vote for particular candidate (Putnam, 2002) Different opinions available on the FB may increase individual to their opinions. FB provides a forum to get involved in expressing themselves.

Valenzuela et al. [14] the use of Facebook is closely related to political agement because of the exposure to the online political FB groups. For instance, studies indicate that political chat serves both political and information seeking needs [15] and that political chat on FB influences political behaviors and attitudes [16].

Objectives

To investigate the relationship between the use of Facebook and online political participation.

To check association between the use of Facebook and offline political participation among youth.

To find out the significance of the use of Facebook on political participation among youth.

Hypotheses

There is an association between the use of Facebook and online political participation (H1)

There is no association between the use of Facebook and online political participation (H0)

There is an association between the use of Facebook and offline political participation (H1)

There is no association between the use of Facebook and offline political participation (H0).

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratification theory of says that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media. Users take an active part in the communication process and are goal oriented in their media use. Media user seeks out a media source that best fulfills the needs of the user. Uses and gratifications assume that the user has alternate choices to satisfy their need. Similarly, FB is used for fulfilling the needs of information and expression of opinions about political issues.

Uses and Gratification are the motivations behind the use of Facebook and political participation among youths [17]. Motives are a fundamental component of political activity and are the universal disposition that influences an individual's action. The use of Facebook is interactive while the core of uses and gratifications is interactivity and active audience; it is therefore regarded as an effective theoretical base for participation [18]. According to Sheldon, [19] youths use Facebook to get new information.

According to Roy, [20] the search of the political information leads youths to use Facebook. Park and Valenzuela [21] also found that youths fulfill the need for expression of their opinions on political. The motivation from online political discussions leads FB users to offline political participation.

Rational of the study

Published studies on the use of Facebook and participation have been limited by the frequency of Facebook use and participation in Facebook activities. For instance, HERI and the Heibert and Harper found that previous studies focused only on measure of time spent on Facebook for participation of youths. Another limitation is that the previous studies did not focus on measuring the link between the use of Facebook and particularly online and offline political participation among youth in Pakistan [22].

This study extends previous research and examines the significant link between the use of Facebook and political participation because youths are the major part of population and highest users of Facebook in Pakistan. Matney and Borland, [23] also argued that 99% of the youth use Facebook for participation on social issues. The study had explored the use of Facebook is not only an abstract in the minds of the people but it is also an important predictor of political participation. Facebook is an important platform for sharing and expression of opinion on political issues for open and operation democratic process in Pakistan.

Material and Methods

In the present study the quantitative research method was used for its completion. Online Google survey method was employed by using structured questionnaire for collection of data from FB users under the age of (15-30). The sample of three hundred and eighty four respondents were selected by using Krejcie and Morgan Table from more than 12.8 million Facebook users in Pakistan. The questionnaire contained of variable of use of Facebook and political participation was developed. Weblink of questionnaire was sent in Facebook and by email to the FB users. Overall responses rate was 345 out 384 respondents. The response rate (89%) was good enough to interpret and generalize the results of the study.

Scale on use of Facebook

The Facebook intensity scale was used to measure of Facebook usage. This measure includes self-reported assessments of Facebook behavior, designed to measure the extent to which the participant was actively engaged in Facebook activities: the number of Facebook. Facebook intensity scale was adapted [24]. The measurement of use of Facebook reliability was alpha=0.50. However, Ellison's [24] alpha for use of Facebook was alpha=0.83).

Participation scale development

The scale used to measure political participation contained response variables related to online political participation and offline political participation. It was borrowed from Rosenstone and Hansen [25] 12-item scale. The responses were measured by five point Likert scale i.e. 'never' (one), rarely,' (two), 'sometimes' (three), very often, (four), 'always' (five). Participation reliability was alpha=0.945.

Analysis and Discussion

The questions were analyzed by using SPSS 22, and empirical results were computed by using reliability, maximum, minimum, mean, standard deviation and variance. Data analysis presents output of the study in the form of tabulation (Table 1).

Use of Facebook	Max	Min	M	SD	Variance	Percent (%)
No. of Facebook Accounts	3	1	1.41	0.590	0.348	47
Duration of Facebook Account (Years)	13	1	5.99	1.907	3.636	46
Weekly time (hr) spent on a Facebook.	4	1	1.10	0.363	0.132	27.5
Total number of friends on Facebook	1667	3	357.47	338.16	114346.02	21
Close/Actual Friends on Facebook.	700	5	108.53	149.3	22299.1	15.6

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on use of Facebook.

The statistics explains that little less than half of respondents had more than one FB accounts (mean=1.41, 47%). It may be possible that one FB account is used for keeping in touch with close friends and family members and the other account may be for public use. It has been found that mostly people on Facebook, particularly, females hide their identity. In Pakistani patriarchal society females are not allowed to meet with strangers on Facebook [26].

Duration of Facebook account of less than half of the FB users was almost six years (mean=5.99, 46%) which indicates that youths consistently use FB for information sharing and expressing opinions on different issues. It might be thought that duration of FB account up is the indication of youth dependence on Facebook for seeking the information of their interests [27]. Regarding weekly time spending on Facebook shows that maximum time spent on Facebook was 4 hours however more than one fourth of the respondents (mean=1.10, 27.5%) spent more than one hour on Facebook in a week FB was as the important medium for youths to spend leisure time and exchange information [17].

Total number of Facebook friends is an important factor for knowing the use of Facebook and political participation. Majority of FB friends of the respondents was 1667 and mean number of FB friends was equal to (mean=357.47, 21%). Mean number of FB friends indicates level of engagement of the respondents on FB with others. More engagement has high chances of exchanging views on FB [28].

However, the maximum close friends of the respondents on Facebook were 700 and less than one quarter of that had more than one hundred (mean=108.53, 15.6%). The mean difference between total number of friends and close friend on Facebook (mean=248.94, SD=149.3) was due to having contacts more public friends and less closes friends and family members indicating Facebook an important part of youth social and political life [29].

Online political participation	M	SD	Variance	Percentage
I invite people online on different political activities	2.9	1.20	1.44	58
I share the policy of a particular party on my timeline	2.7	1.15	1.32	54
I support the political party through my posts	2.8	1.34	1.78	56
I post text about public issues on my Facebook profile page	3.0	1.26	1.67	60
I post video clip about political issues on my profile page	2.7	1.42	2.00	54
I post pictures about political issues on my profile page	2.9	1.28	1.63	58
I discuss various public issues in online social groups	2.7	1.28	1.62	54

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on online political participation.

With respect to online political participation of the respondents used to invite other people for different political activities (Mean= 2.9, 58%) showing their improvements in political matters. Vitak et al. [30] argues that youths tend to engage more in online political participation on Facebook that is a significant predictor of other forms of participation. However, little more than half of the respondents (Mean=2.7, 54%) shared the policy of particular party on their FB timeline which indicated that Facebook users had more tendency of inviting people on Facebook for political than sharing policy of particular party on their FB timeline. According to Burns [31] sharing opinions or views on Facebook might be considered FB users' intent to influence public policy influencing other FB users (Table 2).

Furthermore, most of the FB users (mean=2.8, 56%) supported the political party through their posts. According to Kenski [12] Facebook users support political candidates through their posts and shared political beliefs in political Groups and on FB Pages. Posting text about public issues on Facebook profile page is also important determinant of political participation. Thus, majority of the youth FB users (mean=3.0, 60%) posted text about public issues on their Facebook profile page.

Robertson et al. [32] analyzed that entering in temporally dialogs on Facebook and posting views about public and political issues indicates their interests in politics. Little more than half of the FB users (mean=2.7, 54%) posted video clip about political issues on their Facebook profile page. Use of FB for political purposes has not increased by writing and posting texts but uploading video clips about political issues, Smith and Raine [33] reported that FB use for political purposes includes watching and uploading videos on FB. Thus, for youths the FB has become a primary source for political information. Most of the FB users (mean=2.9, 58%) posted pictures about political issues on their profile page. The mean difference between posting video clips and posting pictures (mean=0.2) indicates that FB users preferred posting pictures about political issues to posting video clips.

According to Pempek et al. [3] posting pictures on Facebook has been an easier form of political participation by expressing opinions with them which leads to reason of posting more pictures on FB than video clips. More than half of the FB users (mean=2.7, 54%) discussed various public issues on Facebook based online social groups. Cheung explained that according to the use and gratifications perspectives group norms has a significant impact on we-intention to use Facebook for discussion in FB based online groups and the similarity with the values of the group will increase tendency to participate in discussion about social and political issues on Facebook.

Offline political participation	M	SD	Variance	Percentage
In 2013 general election, I tried to persuade someone to vote or against a candidate or party	2.8	1.49	2.20	56
In 2013 general election, I worked as a party member for national election	3.0	1.40	1.94	60
In 2013 general elections, I motivated other people to vote for a particular candidate or party	2.8	1.33	1.76	56
In 2013 general election, I attended political protest.	2.6	1.46	2.13	52
I am willing to spend time to support political activities at my locality	3.2	1.48	1.95	64

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on offline political participation.

Table 3 indicates the variable that was offline political participation. According to Masood, [34] the 2013 General Election in Pakistan also witnessed rise of social media particularly Facebook as a tool of election campaign and electoral mobilization. Because of violent attacks on political rallies, a greater emphasis on the Facebook based campaigning was placed. The statistic in the table indicates that most of the respondents (mean=2.8, 56%) tried to persuade someone to vote or against a candidate or party. According to Cheung, [35] Facebook is intentionally used to persuade Facebook users to support particular party. This leads to conclusion that FB as important part of (SNS) is increasingly used to motivate other users for elections. Likewise, majority of the FB users (mean=3.0, 60%) worked as a party member for national elections.

This suggested that FB supplements traditional methods of political participation by providing its users the facility of posting videos, text and campaign rallies online and provides additional outlets for offline political participation as party worker, protesting and chanting slogans.

Therefore, most of the FB users (mean=2.8, 56%) motivated other people to vote for a particular candidate or party which explains that the higher quality photograph and edited texts on FB cause youths to motivate others for participation in elections [35].

In addition to, little more than half of the respondents (mean=2.6, 52%) attended political protest in 2013 general election. According to Valenzuel et al. [36] key predictors of protest behavior is spending more time in online political participation which is likely to engage FB users in offline protests. Reading political text and engaging in FB groups was the most important driver of protest behavior. Majority of the respondents (mean=3.2, 64%) were willing to spend their time in political activities in their localities which indicates that exposure to political discussion on Facebook has both a main and moderating effect on supporting political activities offline which leads to the analysis that that the more politically active people are online, the more they participate in political discussions offline [37].

Online Political Participation Scale	Correlations	Reliability	Variance
I invite people through Facebook in different political activities	0.87	0.96	49.1

I share the policy of a particular party on my timeline	0.82	0.97	50.5
I support the political party through my posts	0.87	0.96	47.5
I post text about public issues on my Facebook profile page	0.93	0.96	47.6
I post video clip about political issues on my Facebook profile page	0.87	0.96	46.5
I post pictures about political issues on my profile page	0.88	0.96	48.1
I discuss various public issues in Facebook based online social groups	0.93	0.96	47.7
Offline Political Participation Scale			
In 2013 general election, I tried to persuade someone to vote or against a candidate or party	0.86	0.68	15.7
In 2013 general election, I worked as a party member for national election	0.87	0.70	16.8
In 2013 general elections, I motivated other people to vote for a particular candidate or party	0.78	0.72	17.6
In 2013 general election, I attended political protest	0.83	0.69	16.2
I am willing to spend time to support political activities at my locality	-0.16	0.95	27.6

Table 4: Correlation and reliability test variable of online and offline political participation.

Table 4 shows the correlation among various variables of the online and offline political participation. Inviting people through Facebook in different political activities had very strong correlation (r=0.862) than online political participation through sharing the policy of a particular party on their timeline (r=0.816). The argument is supported from Vitak et al. [30] that Facebook allows its users to share their political opinions supporting particular political party during elections and interact with others on political discussions. Similarly, online political participation through supporting the political party by their posts had very strong correlation (r=0.864, alpha=0.96) than posting text about public issues on their Facebook profile page (r=0.926). Raynes and Walker [37] also found that interaction on FB and may provide a more powerful incentive to engage in political activity. Majority of the FB users Youths interact with each other about political and public issues because of their experiences of discussion on Facebook groups. Likewise, posting video clip about political issues on their Facebook profile page had lower correlation (r=0.862) than posting pictures about political issues on their profile page (r=0.876). This argument was support from Sheldon [19] Facebook allows a user to upload pictures and interact with those friends through messages. Facebook is the preferred approach among youths for interaction and self-expression by posting images and pictures.

However, discussing various public issues in Facebook based online social groups had very strong correlation (r=0.903) than posting pictures about political issues on their profile page while reliability was higher of posting pictures about political issues on their profile page (alpha=0.96) than discussing various public issues in Facebook based online social groups (alpha=0.9) This argument was supported by Schroeder and Greenbowe [38] that Facebook is currently the fastest

growing social networking with the facility of group discussion because Facebook provides youths an alternative environment of FB group discussion.

It is also indicates the correlation among various items of the offline political participation. Trying to persuade someone to vote or against a candidate or party in 2013 general election had very strong correlation (r=0.853, alpha=0.68) than working as a party member for national election in 2013 general elections (r=0.807, alpha=0.70) while reliability was higher of working as a party member for national election in 2013 general elections (alpha=0.70) than trying to persuade someone to vote or against a candidate or party in 2013 general election. Vitak et al. [30] explained that Facebook is used for persuading other to vote for particular candidate or party. FB environment is conducive for self-expression.

Similarly, in 2013 general elections, motivating other people to vote for a particular candidate or party had strong relationship (r=0.776, alpha=0.72) but lower correlation than in 2013 general election, attending political protest (r=0.826, alpha=0.69). However, reliability was higher of motivating other people to vote for a particular candidate or party. Xenos and Moy [39] argued that FB enables disengaged users to join political protests, increasing the likelihood of being further mobilized both online and offline. They are mobilized by information from Facebook. Furthermore, willing to spend time to support political activities at their locality negatively correlated (r=-11) but its reliability is higher (alpha=0.95) than attending political protest in 2013 general election which means it is not necessary that the people who are willing to spend time to support political activates at their locality has also offline political participation.

Use of Facebook Scale	Online PP	Offline PP
Number of Facebook accounts	0.307 (0.000)	0.182 (0.001)
Duration of Facebook Account (In Years)	-0.267 (0.000)	-0.085 (0.115)

Average Time spent on a Facebook in a week	0.243 (0.000)	0.208 (0.000)
Total number of friends on Facebook	0.419 (0.000)	0.341 (0.000)
Close/Actual Friends on Facebook	0.104 (0.054)	0.176 (0.001)

Table 5: Correlation between use of Facebook and online/offline political participation.

Summary statistics in Table 5 shows that number of Facebook accounts is positively correlated with online and offline political participation of the respondents. As the number of Facebook accounts are precursor in judging the involvement of people in Facebook activities. Therefore, the correlation is highly significant 0.307 (0.000) with online political participation and significant 0.182 (0.001) with offline political participation which is clear evidence that use of Facebook with more accounts has change the traditional pattern of political participation to online political participation because of easy and quick opportunities for political participation [40].

Similarly, the duration of Facebook account in years signifies the attachment with use of Facebook. Thus, there is inverse relationships of duration of Facebook account with the correlation is negatively significant -0.267 (0.000) with online political participation and negatively correlated with -0.085 (0.115) offline political participation which shows that there is inverse relationship as with passage of time FB users may indulge in other entrainment activities of Facebook which may lead to decline in online and offline political participation [41].

Furthermore, Average time spent on a Facebook in a week indicates the use of Facebook as becoming routine part of youths leading them to online and offline political participation. There is highly significant 0.243 (0.000) correlation with online political participation and offline political participation 0.208 (0.000). As reported by Park, et al. [21] that young FB users who used FB frequently are more actively and purposively are inclined to engage in civic and political activities offline because of increasing awareness about political issues.

Moreover, the total number of friends on Facebook shows the social network by Facebook. Therefore, the relationship is highly significant 0.419 (0.000) with online political participation and offline political participation 0.341 (0.000). thus, it suggests that more friends on FB increases opportunities to view more friends' political activities, opinions and conversation about political issues on Facebook which motivates FB users from online political participation to offline political participation [30].

However, close Friends on Facebook shows that there is significant correlation with online and offline political participation of the respondents. As the close of friends on Facebook show that close friends are for sharing more personal matters. Therefore, the correlation is less significant 0.104 (0.054) with online political participation and significant 0.176 (0.001) with offline political participation. It is also argued by Price and Cappella [42] that discussion on politics take place within primary group with family and close friends where FB users feel easier to express their opinions. Nevertheless, discussion among close friends usually starts more about private matter and then political.

Political participation	Online PP	Offline PP
Online	1	0.770
Offline	0.770	1

Table 6: Correlation between online political participation and offline political participation.

The political activism on Facebook accelerates the felling of shared opinions and views on politics, motivating youth to engage in protest participation. So, the increased online political participation increases levels of offline political participation [43]. Therefore, according to the statistics in Table 6 there was highly significant correlation of online political participation (0.770) with offline political participation (0.770).

Conclusion

Use of Facebook is significant in promoting political participation by sharing their views and posting comments on political issues on Facebook. Exchanging opinions and information indicates the understanding of political issues and tendency of youth for political participation. Therefore, the study explored the significant correlation among the sharing political views on Facebook on different ways and their role in motivating youth for political participation in Pakistani society. First, government may introduce awareness campaigns to familiar youth with the importance of use of Facebook for democracy.

Second, higher education administrator, faculty and staff have an opportunity to help students use Facebook in ways that are useful to their participation and to their overall political awareness. Third, by familiarizing youth with use of Facebook for discussion and expression of opinions, government may improve political efficacy among youth for democratic process in Pakistan. Last, the freedom of joining online Facebook groups and sharing information may prepare youth for better role in political activities and overall open and operational democratic process. Thus, organization related to information technology such as institutes of information technology and ministry of information technology need to introduce social media platform like Facebook for freedom of expression for social and particularly political problems in the society.

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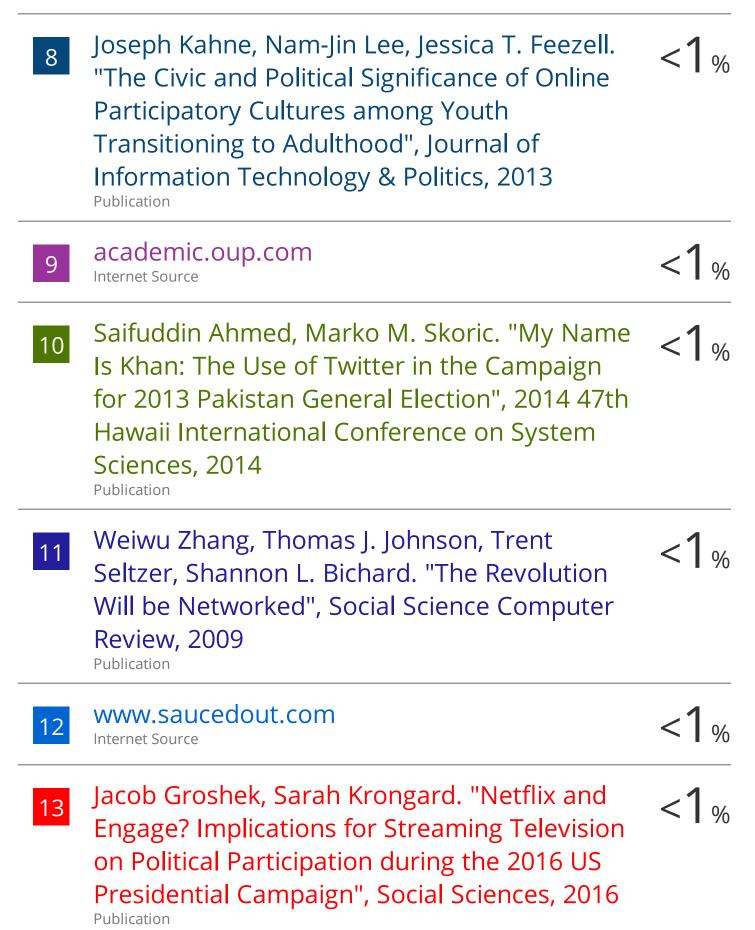
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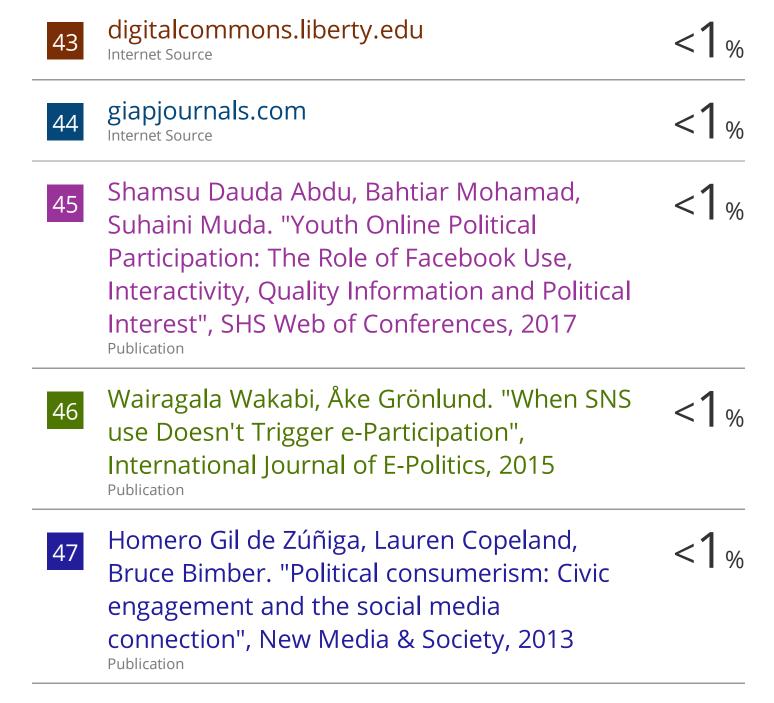Publication

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